08-181 1147

Interview with Harold Pellini
April 2, 1997
by Laurie Horn and Evelyn McClure
for the WSCHS

EM: I always start an interview about their earliest family settling here but I think I want to ask you about your earliest recollection of Sebastopol. What age were you?

HP: I was born in Santa Rosa. My earliest recollection of Sebastopol was coming to Sebastopol and the things that I remember was going through the high water.

EM: What year was that?

HP: Probably in the early to mid 20's

EM: Coming through the high water, what was the situation?

HP: Well my dad came over every day because this was what his life was..

LH: Come by car?

HP: Oh by auto, yes.

EM: Then your family moved here afterwards, your father's business was here?

HP: My father, you want to go way back? He was probably about 5 years old in the mid 1880s. Just he and my grandmother. My grandmother got a job as a cook at the Rudolph Sawmill in Green Valley. Guess its still out there. Somehow I don't know the family, cause my dad has a brother and sister, came as teenagers over here from Switzerland. They owned, my grandmother, owned property over here in the back whereWest Valley Welding is now and thatarea. She had a little farm there. Sebastopol historian, Bill Borba, I'm sure you've heard of him, used to tell me about going to my grandmothers to buy milk, she used to sell milk by the pail and my dad worked as he grew up he was a teamster, he worked for Wes Benepe, another old timer who became Sebastopol postmaster. My dad worked as a teamster (....highschool)

EM: Your grandfather...?

HP: My grandfather never came over.

EM: He was living and stayed in Switzerland?

HP: No I have no history on my grandfather, they separated.

EM: What was your grandmother's first name?

HP: Bessie Pellini. She's in Sebastopol Cemetery.

EM: So she had this little farm, cows...

HP: Few cows and chickens

EM: How much land did she have.

HP: I would imagine 15-20 acres it went down to the Lagoon. I'm not sure but there was another family by the name of Cottini (EM: I've seen that on property maps) I think Mr. Cottini was a brother-in-law to my grandmother. And they did live in Santa Rosa and owned property here. I think that's how my ..there was no welfare in those days, a family had to take care of their own and that why they got started.

EM: So your father grew up here in town...

HP: Yes, worked on the farm, got a sixth grade education its about as far as he went.

EM: What did he do after that? For work?

HP: Then he, the first dairy, on the right hand side going to Santa Rosa, he had that for several years. Oak Vale Dairy. Then he sold that and sort of semi-retired. He bought property, this was a Chinatown. He did buy this property. I don't know if it was all at once or a piece at a time. He was in a semi retirement. But I can always remember him fixing roofs and plumbing. About 1925, he was probably 40 years old by then. So he took care of his property, and opened a cigar store along with the rest of the town cardplayers.

LH: Moran's. Bisordi & Moran's.

HP: He got this business. He started it in 1932. That was the bottom of the Depression. There had been 3 Chevrolet dealers here between 1929 and 1932 and couldn't make it. My dad owned the property and Chevrolet motor co. talked him into doing it by himself. Dan Chiaroni was an employee and helped talk my dad into running it. That's how he got started in the car business.

EM: He kept it up throughout the Depression.

HP: In fact he was selling Frigidaire's at first. My father said it was more profitable than selling Chevrolets.

EM: Did they sell more trucks than cars, this being country?

HP: It always was trucks were secondary to cars, but in this area, trucks were pretty strong. Today trucks are stronger than cars.

LH: Farmers liked coming here, he (Mr. Pellini) was a person they trusted and would give them a good deal. There were a lot of good things about your father.

HP: I hope so and I tried to carry it out.

EM: Your father grew up here and married someone local?

HP: That's another sort of a mystery. Although Laurie's family knew my mother, she was from the coast, she knew all your ancestors, she talked about Carlos and your mother.

LH: I always thought she was born there.

HP: She was orphaned, born in New York. Came out to the Bay, went to school there. Her maiden name was Adams. Some lady, Mrs. Corey, you know that name. (Laurie: Yes) I can remember as a little guy going to visit some person but I always thought it was in Sausalito.

LH: Do you know what year she was born?

HP: Pretty sure it was 1895.

LH: Becaue you heard about the epidemic in New York and they sent all these children on the trains to middle west, influenza. My daughter is doing research on that because she thinks her mother-in-law was one of those, they call them boxcar children. They sent the children away from the epidemic .

HP: She wrote a letter to some genealogy company back there, my mother was trying to find her roots and they wrote back they couldn't locate anything. That was the end of it that was the only attempt ever made.

EM: Do you remember your parents telling stories about their courtship or how they met?

HP: I think my dad was just running around and they just met. I have no idea. My dad used to make his own wine. They bought a ranch, a farm I should say, its still in the family on. Its out on Sparkes Road. He used to make wine for family use, I'd help him, but being a kid I'd do as little as I could. He'd give me a job and I'd work at it and get out and hide. Today, I tried to make wine, I wish I'd stayed and paid a little more attention.

EM: Did they grow their own grapes?

HP: Yes, on the ranch/farm. That was before Sparkes Rd ranch through the ranch.

LH: Its hilly.

HP: It reaches to Elphick Road.

EM: Your parents ...children.

HP: I have a sister too. (Dorothy) She passed away last Sept. she was younger than I.

EM: So you both went to school here.?

LH: What year?

HP: 1937, so it will be the 60th. You were what 36?

LH: 1935.

EM: How many classmates are still around from your high school.?

HP: Surprisingly we get quite a few. Seems like we had close, I get confused, because of spouses. My wife is from St. Helena. Oh I'd say 60 (classmates)

EM: I think its such a nice place to live, people born here don't move away.

LH: Or they come back, they keep their ties, or keep a piece of property. Then you come back.

EM: Its a good place to retire to. Did you immediately decide that after high school you were going to join your father in the business? Or how did that work out?

HP: It was sort of a foregone thing. I had another job opportunity but my dad talked me out of that. I'm glad he did really. Course then the work came along and I was gone nearly 4 years.

EM: What did you do in military service?

HP: I was in anti aircraft artillery.

EM: Were you in Europe? or?

HP: No I was in the Aleutian Islands.

EM: That's Alaska and up there?

HP: Practically to Siberia. Terrible weather.

EM: You were up there years?

HP: I had the winter of 1942 and 1943 and winter of 1944 up there. I came back in 1944 and last years in Los Angeles. I was working in induction. They were ready to send me back over there. You could see the war winding down, we

used to work til 7 to 8 at night when I first was there then we'd get through earlier and earlier and finally I remember we had an order come out we had to stay on the base till 3 pm in the afternoon.

EM: What did you do after the war? Come home, go to school, get married.

HP: I was married when I went in, I got married the end of 1941 and went into the Army March 42.

LH: Did your wife go with you?

HP: I went in in March by June I was in Aleutian Islands, I never got back to Sebastopol until Christmas of 1944. I didn't have any family until I came back.

EM: How many children do you have?

HP: Three children. Six grandchildren

EM: Are they all living in this area?

HP: They are sure disappearing on us, the two girls. Our son is here of course. One girl is in Modoc and one in Nevada. Married and have kids.

LH: Your son has a boy to carry on your name?

HP: Yes he has a son, We have four granddaughters and two grandsons. The youngest is a grandson.

EM: Tell us about your car collection? It is yours? How did you decide to start it?

HP: I've been a car dealer all my life, I love this business. When my dad started I was 12 and I did little chores.

EM: Did you drive a car? They didn't require licenses?

HP: Oh they required a license. I drove until I got picked up. Officer Jim Shanks. He stopped us. So I got a license but you had to be 16. At the time I was 14. And we got what was called a restricted license. Good in the daytime.

LH: With somebody?

HP: No. This is stretching the truth, to help in the business. To deliver cars or parts. Just before us the age was 14.

LH: My brother had a dump truck and had to earn money and he hauled dirt.

HP: They had this restrictive license, I remember it was a pink license. So we got that. Summer vacations I was here.

LH: What was your first car?

HP: A 1930 Chevy.

EM: What it brand new?

HP: No, it was a trade in, a used car. Considered a clunker. When I think back it was only 5 years old, a five year old car today we think is relatively new.

EM: You'd think they would use a car many more years, now we're a throw away society.

HP: They say the old rule of thumb was every 3 years you bought a car. However they didn't last as long. If you could drive your car 50,000 miles without ruining the engine you did real well. Now people think nothing about driving 100,000 miles.

LH: Plus they didn't drive as much or go as far as now.

HP: The cars are built better, maintained better and lubricants are better.

EM: So do you still have that first car?

HP: Wish I did, no. We sold it for $195. Today it would be worth $10,000.

LH: Well you don't know, we don't foresee.

HP: I got the cars, how I got into the old. I took in car, it was old in the early 1950s, it was from the 30s but was a nice car that we sold new. Put it on the lot and sold it for a work car. This guy bought it was apparently an alcoholic and he just bumped this and bumped that and tore it all up. It made me sick. Next time I got one I kept it.

EM: You had to restore the cars you got.

HP: Some have been restored and some already were. There is one that was sold new from here and its original everything. That black 4 door sedan, 1935. That comes back to the driver, the first 1935 model that was delivered to this dealership. it was delivered by train to Santa Rosa and my dad and I went to get it. He let me drive that back.

EM: How did they get cars in, was that the standard way, bring them in by train?

HP: By train or truck, mostly train. There used to be a freight depot over here across from the Round Table pizza and we used to unload them there. 4 vehicles in a boxcar and had a rack they were up like this, two on the bottom and two.

EM: In an enclosed boxcar?

HP: Yes,

EM: How do you get them in there?

HP: Well it was not easy but we kept working at it until we weregetting pretty good at it. We had to talk oil, water and gas. And tools. You jimmy them around to get them out the side door. The freight depot had big steel plates that go between the boxcar and the landing. We got it down we could do a carload in an hour.

LH: When my kids were little I lived on Eleanor and I used to bring them down to watch them unload cars. It was a big deal to unload them properly.

HP: You should see them, its all hydraulic, press the button and this moves and that moves and they haul more cars now. At one time they used to only haul 4 cars. Now they've got six -8-10. So anyway we've acquired cars by trade ins.

EM: Still collecting?

HP: No I've got too many now.

LH: Your son can start collecting.

HP: He's not interested. The girls are but not him. When he was growing up he was into racing. Used to be out at the drag strip all the time.

EM: Are you still involved in showing them?

HP: Not too much in showing. I belong to a couple clubs we go on tours and enjoy them. It's not easy to move them.

LH: Did you go to England with the Helwigs. He went to England didn't he?

HP: No. He went to England and to Australia. Actually took a car to Australia.

EM: They were races?

HP: No we call them tours. Travels. Last summer we went to South Dakota for a Chevy meet. We drove a new car, not an old car. There are a lot of people take trailers (with cars) I don't have a trailer. It's a lot of work.

EM: Let's talk about Sebastopol. Talk about Chinatown. We're asking everyone what their memories of Chinatown were?

HP: We had two Chinatowns, one by Diamond Lumber, New Chinatown and this was Old Chinatown.

EM: Were they here when you were a boy?

HP: Yes,

LH: You said when your grandmother had the little farm, there were Chinese people then.

HP: There were. Those buildings look like they could have been built back then, dark wood, wooden side walk, porch over, there was a joss house about where our service dept. is now. The first building behind this property was a joss house. Every one of the Chinese places was a store. There was one, remember the Kubuchis (sp?) they lived in the last place on the right hand side.

EM: So it was all where this property is now. The car dealership.

HP: No it was on that street. over there, if you want to come up this way we have the service station and a Japanese grocery story were the antique cars are. Rember that. Hamamotos had it. Then Boswell's poultry processing plant where that lot is then were Frizelle feed store is now, there is a vacant lot, you can still see foundation there was a big feed store there.

LH: Was that Edwards.

HP: I that that was Frizelle, Edwards built the one that is Frizelle now. Rolly Edwards built that, Bill's father. Chinatown I guess was torn down during the war, when I was gone it disappeared.

EM: Was it because the buildings were dilapidated?

HP: They were pretty dilapidated.

LH: They were like tenements, shacks.

HP: They had redwood rough 1x12s vertical that was the bldg. seems like there were a lot of two stories. Store on the bottom and they lived upstairs.

LH: I remember going home with one girl, Isabel Wong. She went into this cubby hole.

HP: Dorothy Wong too. I always want to call him Fat. Because he was the man who built the store in the other Chinatown.

LH: That's what we always called him in school.

HP: Fat Fung? LH: Yes. Well he was. He was chubby.

LH: Well there were some gambling places too.

HP: Almost everyone had lotteries.

EM: There was this Chinese community, did people patronize their stores or did their own community people patronizing Chinese businesses.

HP: I really don't know. I just don't remember. It just didn't interest me at all.

LH: I remember my brother going there to get something to eat, a bowl of soup, then he'd come home with this ticket with marks. Well I was younger. I remember the smell when he'd come home.

HP: After the war they did build a Chinese restaurant. It was on the left side going that way. A couple buildings back from the existing street.

EM: Near Frizelle Enos?

HP: Barnes Street, on that. The best bldg. was where the store was on (sounds like Bootland?) street at the corner there. I don't when Diamond Lumber yard started thats when Chinatown disappeared.

LH: That might have been during the way. My brother did a lot of house moving, building, wrecking. Wrecked the grammar school and used the materials to build houses. He might have done some of that.

EM: I wonder what happened to the Chinese families that were living here?

LH: Well there are a couple families still living here.

EM: We didn't talk about how you and your wife met?

HP: She, (Millie Pellini) went to business college

EM: She's from Sebastopol?

HP: No she's from St. Helena. She had a sister who lived here, married sister. That's how I got acquainted. She came over and she went to work for L.G. Scott, the lawyer, as secretary. During that time I met her.

EM: What age were you when you got married?

HP: I was 21. I got married in October, in December Pearl Harbor happened so then I went away in March and never got back until the day before Christmas 1944. Sebastopol had changed a little bit in that time.

EM: What were some of the changes you noticed?

HP: Well my barber I couldn't find him, old Jim Clark. (Laurie: Well he did move around) I can't recall but it seemed different. Most people went away, after they got their basic training over with they came home.

LH: I think some of the buildings were gone that were here before (the war).

HP: I can't tell you but it was different.

EM: How long did your father live? When did he die?

HP: He died in 1965.

EM: So he was around during the war? Did your wife work after you were married?

HP: She helped out, every so often the office help would leave or something. While I was gone whe worked for Western Auto. Actually she came as a temporary for L.G. Scott, remember Jean McFarlane. Jean had some operation and was off work a couple months and that's what my wife, replaced her. She worked for the Chamber of Commerce for awhile under Marguerite Fuller.

LH: I still keep in touch with her niece, Beverly Jewell. Remember Dr. Jewell the dentist, his daughter lives in Petaluma, moved to Idaho and now she's back in Santa Rosa.

HP: I remember the Malm kids. I guess the youngest one, Gene. Used to be a pilot. He lived out on Watertrough rd. I haven't seen him in quite awhile. He used to be a customer here.

EM: Did you get involved in various community things over the years?

HP: Oh yeah you have to. I was on the board of directors of the chamber of commerce, served on a lot. of ..what we know now as the.apple blossom festival used to call it.. had a different name .(LH: the apple show?) well no, Jean McFarlane got this thing started. I was in charge of a booth one time up in the park everything went fine we had a beautiful festival for 2 days Sunday afternoon, people started to lock up and I was standing there by myself having to clean up the park. The next year, I did it, I think that first year taught me a lot, it was a lot easier. I always George Ramondo was working for me and he came by and helped me and Russ Shura, who was a neighbor (and Fire Chief) came by.

LH: When we were little they used to have the Apple Show and had a big tent where the empty lot where the post office is and carnival, chautauqua.

HP: Before our time it looked like it was bigger, they had a permanent front with ticket booth and entrance, stucco, I've seen pictures of it. My folks had postcards, they had an actual size locomotive made out of apples. (Referring to the 1910-1915 Apple Shows in Sebastopol) However the ones you (Laurie) and I remember were still pretty nice apple shows. Then we had a little one over here on the Diamond lot for 2-3 years.

EM: Do you remember what years those were?

HP: The ones we were talking about, I'd say late 20's and early 30s.

EM: And the one at the Diamond Lumber lot?

HP: Well that was in the late 40s, because I remember my dad sent over a new 1941. Someone took the cigarette lighter and burned the seat. Cal Tynn (spelling?) bought that car, he always talked about, He wanted the car but wanted something done about the burn. So my dad gave him a set of new seat covers.

HP: When my dad had the diary he had milkers not machines.

EM: How cows did he have?

HP: That I can't tell you however no one could ever make a go of that ranch because the help would get on the electric train and go into Santa Rosa and party and never get back to milk.

EM: It went right through the property didn't it?

HP: Just about. My dad said many a time he was milking the cows around the clock by himself. The electric train from Forestville brought alot of kids to school. I walked to school because I lived down here (Pellini home on Hy.12 at Morris)

EM: Did you ever ride the train for fun?

HP: No not really I never rode it. My folks always had a car and my mother could drive as well as my father so we drove. The train was pretty good it took you right up 4th street.

LH: Yeah, my brother went to school. Mr. Staton was the principal of the grammar school.

HP: That was before my time.

LH: He beat my brother, my mother got mad and took him out of school and sent him over to Wright School.

HP: There was a big deal about that. Staton, there was a suit. Was that your brother?

LH: I guess it was and there were other people involved too. So he went to school by train.

HP: To the Wright School, now that was a little country school. That was just over here where the divided highway starts near Wright Road.

LH: There was a lady who lived on Healdsburg Ave. She was the teacher.

EM: A one room school, Wright school.

LH/HP: Yes. Remember the boys played in back and the girls in front. Big school and little school. The new school was next door.

EM: In high school did they have sports?

HP/LH: Oh yes. HP: The Japanese and Chinese students we were talking about they were all football players and good athletes. Kibuchi and Fat Fung.

EM: Did you play sports?

HP: No I'm not a very good sports person. I was in the Analy band though. Played trumpet. Was in the parade when the Golden Gate bridge opened.

EM: The band went down?

HP: Yes. You know even Kek Knight (Analy music teacher) was confused on this. We never wanted to (?). There was a big parade in San Francisco and I don't know what schools there were, Sonoma, Analy and Healdsburg andSanta Rosa. Formed one big band. Of course we had our own colors and uniforms and I was marching close to the outside so we could hear comments and I remember hearing someone say I guess they didn't have enough money so they could all have the same uniforms. -- the hicks from the country you know.

LH: I remember some of the teachers at Analy. One said it was kind of a waste of time for the kids at Analy to take college courses because none of the apple knockers kids had the smarts to go on to college. I took that personally, had a big fight with him. The daughter he was talking about is now a professor at a university.

HP: That was your daughter?. LH: Yes, that was just his opinion.

LH: When the museum first started I tried to get together all the people who had ridden to school on the train and at that time Fred got a list of names that came from the Hessel district and from Verna Tischer or someone gave me a list from Forestville and I thought how neat that would be to have a get together but I don't know what happened to the names.

EM: Oh we have to resurrect that for the train exhibit in 1998.

HP: Did you go to the reunion for (SUGS?) When you go to a reunion, its your age bracket but that almost a generation that went to school there.

EM: You've got an acronym there...?

LH: Sebastopol Union Grammar School. Analy Union High School.

HP: When I first came over here, I started school in Santa Rosa, came over in the 3rd grade. The t-shirt said SUGS. It took me awhile (to translate it)

LH: The kids came in from all around the country (side).

HP: Bill Marshall, his early ancestor settlers came from the Marshall district which was out there west of town, after Mill Station makes the bend where Marshall school was.

end of tape